

In doing research for a D-Day story, I came across Museum of History and Industry transcripts from various individuals recollecting that era.

The first woman copy editor at The Seattle Times was hired during World War II. In this edited transcript, she remembers what it was like for her back then. The war opened up opportunities for women in various jobs.

Lucile McDonald died in 1992 at age 93. She had had a storied career that ranged from writing children's books to working for United Press in South America and New York. The interviewer is Lorraine McConaghy for MOHAI. April 6, 1985.

I hadn't been doing newspaper work for a number of years, and I was writing juvenile books and keeping house . . . the women in the neighborhood began hounding me to join different things for war projects. They thought that I was less than enthusiastic.

So they started this child evacuation course, and it was in a school district office in Seattle, on Dexter Avenue. I went into that, and there was a good-sized registration . . . Then, when the course was over, I was immediately called to go down and sit at the Washington Children's Home an afternoon, doing child care. I had enough of it right then. I said, "I know I'm a mother and all that, but. . ."

I visualized myself, since I was writing all those children's books at the time, entertaining the children and doing a "story lady" sort of thing. I realized that there wasn't going to be much of that. It was just plain drudgery. It was a regular childcare thing because a lot of women were working at Boeing and at the shipyard, and they were hunting daycare places for their children. So I decided I'd better get back into something I was fitted for, and I began looking for a newspaper job.

I wanted somewhere with reasonable pay. I had been a well-paid newspaperwoman before . . . In Portland, I was on The Oregonian, and I had been news editor on the Bend Bulletin and telegraph editor on the Salem Statesman, during the First World War, and I had been news editor with a daily up in Alaska, and I had been with the United Press in South America, and in New York, before the New York Times. So I was getting decent pay.

When I went to apply for some openings that occurred, the first one was in radio news. They offered me so little that I was kind of offended; I didn't say so but . . .

So I went and asked some advice of one of my newspaper friends. The editor on the [Seattle] Times who had known me in Portland, and knew what I could do. I stopped by the Seattle Times and called him out and talked to him in the lobby . . .

Well, I was barely home when I got a call from him saying there was an opening as a copy-reader on the Seattle Times, and how about it? would I do copy reading?

I said, "Well, I did copy reading during the last war, and I could do it again."

Then the managing editor called me and arranged for me to come down on Monday morning, when I was to have gone to work at the radio station. You see, as I was leaving

the radio station, the man said to me, "You know, since it's been a long time since you've worked, I think we'd better pay you only so much until we see how you do."

So, anyhow, I went down to the Times and talked to the managing editor, and told him what I had had for pay. So that was that.

I went to work on the Times, and one day the managing editor came through and he was showing somebody through, and he said, "This just that unknown quantity" - I forget exactly how he put it - "a woman copy reader."

So I was the first woman copy reader they had employed on the Seattle papers.

I didn't enjoy copy reading, and I stayed that first year, and then I decided I'd go home when summer came, and the children were home again. I thought I'd go home and finish a book I was working on. So I quit the job and went home. They didn't leave me in peace.

They kept calling me into the Times to substitute for a week here and a week there in the same department where I'd worked in the Features Department.

I stayed twenty three years with the Seattle Times ! (laughing)

Q. How did you dress for work?

I wore the clothes you'd wear to go traveling 'conventional things, and nothing elaborate.

You see, on a newspaper job like mine became, when I became a feature writer, I had to go to work prepared to go out to any kind of a meeting, a dinner or anything. I had to wear in-between clothes that were acceptable everywhere. I've always said that newspaper women should dress that way. They don't know where they're going to get sent on assignment.

Q. Where you writing women's articles, basically?

No, I wasn't. I never have worked at a woman's job on a newspaper.

Q. How do you define a 'woman's job' on a newspaper

When I went into newspaper work, the average newspaper had a society editor and a woman's club editor, and a newspaper like the Times would have one woman on general assignment. So my aspiration was to be that woman on general assignment.

And that was all I supposed I could do to get ahead. But when the war came along, editing jobs opened up, and all kinds of reporting jobs . . . we had part of the office they called oh, what was it -- some kind of an island

- there were four or five women seated in a little group there, and the menfolk made fun of it . . .

This is from a letter that I wrote to a friend

in October, 1942: "I work for a man who is a bearcat. When he blows up, the air is blue with smoke profane smoke. His vocabulary is extraordinary, but thus far none of it has been directed. at me. He got over saying what he when I first came there, that I was "that damned woman."

. . . A lot of women took subjects in school, just as I took journalism, knowing that the field was stacked against us. And then we got the opportunity and kept on with it. They had a woman real estate editor for years after the war, at the Times, and she probably got her opportunity during the war.